

E. Coli 0157:H7 Outbreak Background and Update September 15, 2006

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an alert about an outbreak of E. coli O157:H7 in multiple states that may be associated with the consumption of produce. Background information on E. Coli and the outbreak are below along with steps that VDH is taking to educate the public on this issue are below.

Background

- Preliminary epidemiological evidence suggests that bagged fresh spinach may be a possible cause of this outbreak. Therefore the FDA is advising consumers to not eat fresh bagged spinach at this time.
- Virginia Department of Health is advising consumers in Virginia to follow the FDA's recommendation of avoiding raw bagged spinach.
- As of now there are no reported cases in Virginia, but cases have been identified in Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah and Wisconsin.
- To date there are 50 cases, eight of them developed a form of kidney failure called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) and there has been one death.
- People who do get sick from E. Coli usually experience symptoms in 3-4 days after exposure. However, it can take as long as 10 days.
- Symptoms include abdominal cramps and severe bloody diarrhea. In some cases it can become more severe and cause HUS and or even death.
- Some people may never experience symptoms and others may experience less severe symptoms. Children and elderly are at more of a risk since children's immune systems are not as developed and elderly individuals may have more chronic conditions that compromise their immune systems.
- If people develop these symptoms VDH and the FDA are advising them to seek medical attention. Children especially should be taken to the doctor because diarrhea can cause severe dehydration.

VDH Action Steps

- VDH has responded to this alert with a news release that emphasizes that Virginia does not have a reported case yet, but people should still take precautionary measures to avoid exposure to E. Coli.
- The VDH Web site has been updated with information on E. coli, precautions that should be taken and the news release.
- VDH Communications team has been fielding calls from the media. Our message echoes that of FDA to avoid consuming bagged raw spinach, but also emphasizes clean practices like washing your hands after you use the bathroom, clean kitchen practices and washing raw vegetables before they are consumed.
- Restaurants are being advised to throw out bagged raw spinach.